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Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5404th meeting

Thursday, 30 March 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Mayoral	(Argentina)
Members:	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Mahiga
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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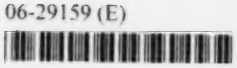

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Austria, Israel, Lebanon, Malaysia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Carmon (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 March 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/197, and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Thursday, 30 March 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 28 March 2006 from the Acting Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which reads as follows:

> "In my capacity as Acting Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I have the honour to request that His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee, be invited to participate in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council."

In accordance with past practice in this matter, I propose that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Paul Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will first hear a briefing by Mr. Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Kalomoh: I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting the Secretariat to provide this briefing.

The past month has seen major political developments in the Middle East: the establishment of a new Palestinian Government following the elections in January, the conduct of a general election in Israel, and the beginnings of an important national dialogue in Lebanon.

Two days ago, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) approved, by 71 votes to 36, the new Palestinian Government, led by Mr. Ismail Haniyeh and comprising Hamas members and independents. The vote followed two months of discussions on the possibility of forming a national unity Government, which did not bear fruit. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas swore in the new Government on 29 March on his return from the Arab League summit in Khartoum, which reaffirmed the commitment of the Arab States to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. The summit also reaffirmed support for the road map.

President Abbas had earlier written to Mr. Haniyeh to express his concern at the draft Government programme prepared by Hamas and to ask him to align the programme with that of the Palestinian presidency. The programme subsequently outlined by Prime Minister Haniyeh in his speech before the PLC expresses its respect for the constitutional relationship with President Abbas and its honouring of the relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on the basis of respect for their respective constitutional mandates. It does not, however, acknowledge the status of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people or the basic tenets of its 1988 declaration of independence, as requested by Fatah and other parties in discussions on a national unity Government.

The following priorities are identified in the programme: all matters related to the occupation, the provision of security, improvement of the economic situation, internal reform and fighting corruption, reinforcing the status of the Palestinian cause in the Arab and Islamic worlds and developing international relations to serve Palestinian interests.

It will be recalled that the Quartet and the Security Council have called on the new Government to commit to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map. This morning the Quartet principals issued a statement, which included the following:

> "The Quartet welcomed President Abbas's call for the new Palestinian Government to commit to a platform of peace and, having carefully assessed the programme of the new Government approved on 28 March, noted with grave concern that the new Government has not committed to the principles spelled out on 30 January 2006.
>
> "The Quartet recalled its view that future assistance to any new Government would be reviewed by donors against that Government's commitment to the principles outlined above. The Quartet concurred that there inevitably will be an effect on direct assistance to that Government and its ministries.
>
> "The Quartet encouraged continued humanitarian assistance to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian people. The Quartet noted in that context the importance of improved movement and access."

The Palestinian Authority continues to be unable to meet its financial obligations. Although the Authority's salary payments were made in February, the Authority was unable to pay $15 million to $20 million in unemployment and other social benefits. Depending on the honouring of pledges made at the Arab League summit, a financing gap of approximately $60 million exists for March salaries.

I now turn to Israeli political developments. Israeli elections were held two days ago. According to provisional results, the new Kadima party, led by Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, emerged with 28 seats in the Knesset, followed by Labour with 20 seats, Shas with 13, Yisrael Beiteinu with 12 and Likud with 11. The remaining seats were shared by smaller parties.

Mr. Olmert stated during the campaign that only parties committed to the so-called convergence plan that he outlined would be invited to join a Kadima-led coalition Government. This plan involves withdrawal from parts of the West Bank, combined with the annexing of major settlement blocs, with the stated goal of setting Israel's permanent borders by 2010. Officials have indicated that important details of the convergence plan remain to be worked out and that Israel would seek international support for it.

According to statements made during the campaign, Israel would stand ready to proceed unilaterally should it judge that negotiations with the Palestinian side were not possible. President Abbas, for his part, has rejected unilateral measures and has indicated his desire to enter into negotiations with Israel at the earliest opportunity. Acting Prime Minister Olmert said on election night that

> "if the Palestinians are wise enough to act, then in the near future we will sit together at the negotiating table to create a new reality. If they do not, Israel will take its destiny in hand".

In that context, it remains to be seen whether Israel will adhere to its stated policy holding that the entire Palestinian Authority, including the presidency, has become a terrorist entity. That policy has already led Israel to freeze the transfer to the Palestinian Authority of Palestinian customs and VAT revenues amounting to approximately $50 million per month, notwithstanding the provision of the Paris Protocol on the subject.

Allow me now to report on security developments. Members of the Council have already been briefed on the events in the Jericho prison on 14 March and the reaction in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as on the efforts of the Secretary-General, among others, to ensure that the situation did not escalate and that calm was restored. President Abbas has demanded the immediate return of many of the prisoners. Israel, on the other hand, has indicated that it intends to hold and try them for their alleged crimes.

Israel was on high security alert during most of the reporting period, and both Israelis and Palestinians suffered from violence. An Israeli civilian was killed and another injured in separate shooting incidents in the northern West Bank on 1 March. A 15-year-old Palestinian boy was killed in an operation in the Ein Bitilma refugee camp on 3 March, where another teenager was injured. On 6 March a targeted action by Israel against two alleged Palestinian militants in Gaza killed three Palestinian children, including two brothers, and injured eight other passersby. Rockets continued to be launched by Palestinians from Gaza into Israel throughout the month, including, for the first time, a Katyusha rocket on 28 March, and Israel continued to fire artillery at rocket launching sites and bombarded the access routes leading to them. On March 25, a Palestinian teenager was killed in one such bombardment. Israel reported that its security measures prevented a number of terrorist attacks during the month.

Let me now address the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Citing security concerns, Israel has closed the Karni crossing into Gaza for 46 days since the beginning of the year. As a consequence, stocks of basic food commodities, including wheat flour, have been severely depleted. The crisis peaked between 17 and 21 March, when bakeries were forced to close and food rationing was introduced. Since then, Karni has reopened to allow over 1,300 truckloads of food to enter Gaza, and stocks of basic commodities are stabilizing.

The closure of Karni also seriously affected the export of produce from Gaza, including from greenhouse installations, previously operated by Israeli settlers, that had been preserved with international support. Some $5.2 million in potential exports were destroyed after perishing before they could be exported. On 26 March the export of goods was permitted for the first time in two weeks. The continuous operation of the Karni commercial crossing, as envisaged in last November's Agreement on Movement and Access, remains vital to Gaza's economic viability and social welfare.

As in neighbouring areas of Israel, avian flu has recently been confirmed in two locations in Gaza and is suspected in two other locations in the Strip. An estimated three million birds are affected. The United Nations system is working closely with both parties to contain this crisis. The Food and Agricultural Organization is dealing with the Palestinian Minister for Agriculture, and the World Health Organization is encouraging and coordinating donor response and is supporting the Palestinian Minister for Health in addressing potential cases of human infection. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Bank are examining options for distributing cash compensation to farmers.

Avian flu is affecting the whole region, including Israel. The Secretary-General welcomes the cooperation among the region's Governments to combat this serious problem and arrest the spread of the disease. He thanks the Government of Israel for the material and technical support it has provided to the Palestinian Authority. Additional assistance from the international community to the Palestinian Authority is required.

Let me now turn to developments in Lebanon. In Lebanon, political leaders have been engaged since 2 March in a national dialogue to address major issues affecting their country, including the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). Discussions so far have led to important consensus on certain issues, including the international investigations into

the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 22 others, a court of an international nature to try the assassins, and rebuilding Lebanese-Syrian relations on the basis of non-interference and mutual respect with a view to establishing full diplomatic relations.

Consensus has also emerged on how to address the question of Palestinian weapons. In this regard, Prime Minister Siniora was tasked with making direct contact with President Assad to discuss the way forward. The two leaders had an initial meeting on this issue in Khartoum, on the margin of the Arab summit.

Participants in the dialogue also agreed to initiate a process through which to identify the Shab'a Farms as Lebanese. As the Council is aware, in 2000 the Security Council confirmed the Secretary-General's assessment that the Shab'a Farms lie in an area occupied by Israel in the 1967 war and thus do not fall within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operation and the purview of resolution 425 (1978), but rather of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). However, as is stated in the Secretary-General's report of 22 May 2000 (S/2000/460), the line of withdrawal identified by the United Nations is to be "without prejudice to future border agreements between the Member States concerned".

A national dialogue is now concentrating on the issue of the presidency and on reaching a national consensus on the weapons of Hizbollah. The situation along the Blue Line has remained quiet, although there has been continuing concern regarding the potential for instability. The Israeli authorities reported concern over a possible operation by Hizbollah against Israeli targets. The Secretary-General has appealed to the leaders of Israel, Lebanon and Syria to do their utmost to maintain calm, the importance of which cannot be overstated, particularly at this time.

Allow me to conclude with these brief observations.

First, while the programme of the new Palestinian Government shows signs of evolution from Hamas' deeply disturbing record and covenant, the Government should, as President Abbas has urged, reassess its positions on the Quartet's principles and President Abbas' platform of peace, if the aspirations of the Palestinian people for peace and statehood are to enjoy the strong international support they deserve.

Secondly, as we await the formation of a new Israeli Government, we must recall that if the prospect of a viable Palestinian State in the framework of a two-State solution is seen to dwindle because of unilateral Israeli action, it will become even more difficult to persuade Palestinians that there is anything to be gained from moving toward a compromise. The interest in negotiations recently expressed by both acting Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas should be seriously explored.

Thirdly, despite the gulf between the parties, they and the international community share a common interest and duty to prevent a security or humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory. In this context, and while mindful of Israeli security concerns, we would observe that the extended closure of Gaza has caused real hardships.

Finally, the beginning of the national dialogue in Lebanon is an historic and positive development. All the political leaders of the country have come together without any external prodding for an open discussion of issues of national concern. Notable progress has been achieved. The process underscores the fact that dialogue remains the most effective way to reach consensus, and consensus is in turn the most effective means of ensuring stability and national unity in Lebanon. We encourage the Lebanese parties to maintain their commitment to this dialogue as a means through which Lebanon addresses both its national priorities and international commitments. Let us hope that their efforts will continue to bear fruit, thus sending a message throughout the region that peaceful dialogue is indeed the only way forward.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish express our warm congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. I would also like to thank the members of the Security Council for undertaking the initiative of convening a public meeting regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Suffice to say, it is of the utmost importance for the Security Council, with its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, to address the perilous situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Before I begin my statement, I wish to recall that today the Palestinian people are observing Land Day,

known as "Youm al-Ard" in Arabic, to commemorate the killing of six Palestinians peacefully protesting the Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land in the Galilee in 1976. Land Day has become a time to remember and protest Israel's persisting systematic policies of injustice and oppression against the Palestinian people, especially the illegal expropriation of their land and their expulsion from it.

I wish to note that I will omit some of the paragraphs of the text of my statement in order to save time.

The Security Council is meeting today on the heels of an important development that took place in the Middle East. On the 28 and 29 March the Arab League convened its annual summit in Khartoum, in which, among other things, it unanimously affirmed the principal of establishing an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the need for a just solution for the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The summit rejected all unilateral Israeli actions, including attempts to judaize Jerusalem, the continuation of its illegal settlements campaign and the construction of its expansionist wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem.

Moreover, the eighteenth annual summit of the Arab League called for the reinvigoration of the Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut in 2002, which called for full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967 in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which were reaffirmed by the Madrid Conference of 1991, and the land for peace principle. The summit called for Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital in return for the establishment of normal relations in the context of a comprehensive peace with Israel. This initiative — drafted by the Custodian of the Two Holy Masques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, and adopted by the Arab countries and the members of the Organization of Islamic Conference — is an opportunity that must not be missed. Israel should seize this unique historic moment.

The Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut called for the formation of a special ministerial committee to act as a catalyst to internationalize the initiative by garnering the utmost support by the international community, in particular from the United Nations, including the Security Council.

As members are all aware, the Palestinian people, languishing under Israeli occupation, went to the polls on 25 January of this year to vote for their new legislature. The international community, including the international observers monitoring the elections, hailed the Palestinian people for their commitment to democracy. The elections were deemed by all to be free, transparent and fair. Indeed, it was a very proud day for the Palestinian people, not only because of the festival of democracy displayed, but because they conducted the elections in a disabling environment under Israeli military occupation.

The new cabinet has been approved by the Palestinian parliament and was sworn in by President Mahmoud Abbas yesterday. It must be reiterated that the Palestinian people must not be punished by anyone for exercising their democratic right to elect their representatives. As in all democratic elections, the choice of the people deserves respect and support. In this context, Israel must immediately release monthly tax payments belonging to the Palestinian people, in accordance with an economic protocol signed between the two sides in 1994 in Paris.

It is important to recall that on a number of occasions since the Palestinian elections, President Abbas has reaffirmed the commitment by the Palestinian side to all obligations and agreements signed by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and by the Palestinian National Authority. They includes the provisions of international law, international conventions, United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III), the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut and all the agreements signed with Israel.

The Government of Israel has intensified and accelerated its attempts to carry through with its unilateral actions intended to further entrench the illegitimate measures already taken by the occupying Power in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The political platform of the newly elected Acting Prime Minister of Israel was based on a dangerous campaign that called for a unilateral definition of the borders of Israel in the next four years by keeping control of strategic parts of the occupied West Bank, occupied East Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and three major illegal settlement blocs.

This illegal plan is an attempt to legitimize the Israeli settlements and would effectively mean the end of the two-State solution, for it would result in the creation of a series of Bantustans in the occupied Palestinian territories, violate the rights of the Palestine people and deny the rights of the Palestinian refugees. That plan, which attempts to weaken international opposition to the catastrophic expansionist wall, is also a blatant violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. It represents a complete departure from the road map and its substance, as well as from the principle of achieving a peaceful settlement through negotiations between the two parties and without prejudgment or pre-emption of the final status issue.

For our part, we are committed to a just, lasting and comprehensive final settlement, in accordance with international law and legitimacy, negotiated and agreed by both parties, based on the borders of 4 June 1967. We reject and oppose all unilateral solutions, including the idea of a transitional Palestinian State with temporary borders. Such solutions would not end the occupation or create a viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State.

In this regard, the international community must condemn and reject the E1 plan. It represents a departure from the road map and would render final status negotiations devoid of all meaning. It would isolate occupied East Jerusalem from the West Bank by encircling it with illegal settlement structures and the expansionist wall, put an end to its territorial contiguity with the rest of the Palestinian territory and tip the demographic balance of Jerusalem in favour of Israel by sustaining a Jewish majority through the incorporation of Jerusalem's illegal settler population.

Israeli unilateralism and militarism must be rejected and must not be allowed to replace constructive political dialogue and pragmatism. The unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, since it was not negotiated with the Palestinian side and ignored all Palestinian concerns, has proved to be disastrous. It has not been a step forward, as some had thought it would be. Israel continues to retain ultimate control of the Gaza Strip by controlling its borders, territorial sea and airspace. The withdrawal has turned the Gaza Strip into a massive prison, entirely besieged by Israel, with no attributes of sovereignty or independence.

While the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza was intended to represent the end of Israel's military occupation of Gaza, it has become clear now to all who comply with and respect international law that the Fourth Geneva Convention continues to apply to the Gaza Strip. In this connection, the Palestinian side will reject any and all unilateral actions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, constitutes one single territorial unit. To suggest that Gaza should enjoy a status different from that of the West Bank would violate the territorial integrity, unity and contiguity of Palestine and the substantive law of self-determination.

Israel has continued with its illegal colonization policy and de facto annexation of huge parts the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel has carried out all of those actions in spite of the absolute prohibition on such colonization under the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocol I, which defines such actions as war crimes, as does the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court. Israel has carried out all of those actions in spite of the fact that the Security Council has reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention in 27 resolutions that request the occupying Power to comply with its provisions, some of which specifically request the cessation of settlement activities and consider the annexation of East Jerusalem to be null and void. Furthermore, Israel persists in disrespecting the law by failing to heed to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, of 9 July 2004, which found that the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law.

Moreover, the occupying Power has begun to physically transform the Qalandiya checkpoint in the West Bank into an international crossing point. Those actions are further undermining the territorial integrity and contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territory and are thus making the vision of a two-State solution increasingly impossible. Without a viable Palestinian State, there cannot be a solution whereby two States live side by side.

Israel's disingenuous pronouncement that it has "no partner" with whom to negotiate peace should be viewed from the perspective of unilateralism. The Palestine Liberation Organization, which is headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people everywhere. It is therefore the only real negotiating partner.

It is obvious that it has been Israel's occupation and colonization of the Palestinian territory that has obstructed a comprehensive peace agreement. This has occurred regardless of whether or not the Palestinian people have had a Government, whether one headed by the late President Yasser Arafat or one headed by President Mahmoud Abbas.

It must be stated clearly that it is neither the Palestinian people nor Palestinian democracy that represents a challenge to the resolution of the conflict. Rather, that challenge can continue to be attributed to Israel's "no partner" mantra, its confiscation and colonization of Palestinian land, its oppression and subjugation of an entire people, its consistent violation of international law, its defiance of United Nations resolutions and the political paralysis of the international community.

I would like to draw the attention of the Council to the tragic situation in which the Palestinian people continue to find themselves in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In grave violation of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, the occupying force is continuing to carry out its deadly attacks against the Palestinian people, including extrajudicial executions. It has become common practice for the occupying Power to launch military attacks against targets in densely populated civilian areas in the occupied Palestinian territory, endangering the safety and lives of thousands of civilians. Israel is continuing to behave as a State that is above the law, with no concern for reproach, punishment or the consequences of its actions.

The wounding, maiming and killing of defenceless Palestinian civilians, including women and children, has continued unabated. As of today, more than 3,800 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli occupying forces in military attacks since September 2000. Thousands have been injured, many seriously and permanently, by the occupying forces. Thousands of Palestinian civilians continue to be detained or imprisoned by the occupying Power under conditions that continue to be a matter of grave concern.

In the context of that culture of impunity, on 14 March 2006, Israeli occupying forces, using tanks, armoured vehicles, helicopters and bulldozers, invaded the West Bank town of Jericho and stormed the Muqata building, killing two Palestinians and wounding at least 35 other people. During that military raid, Israeli occupying forces kidnapped six Palestinian detainees. We hold Israel, the occupying Power, responsible for the safety of those men and demand that the Israeli authorities return them to Palestinian custody. To do otherwise, including any attempt to try them in an Israeli court, would be a violation of international law, as well as of the Ramallah Agreement. The Security Council members must remain seized of the matter and assist in the return of these men to Palestinian custody.

Furthermore, Israel has not ended its imposition of collective punishment on the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including arbitrary restrictions on their movement through the placement of hundreds of checkpoints.

I would also like to address the catastrophic humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza. As documented by various agencies and human rights organizations, the occupying Power has prevented the most basic food supplies and medicines, including grain, dairy products and even baby formula, from entering Gaza. The policy of starvation — or, as an adviser of the Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert described it, "putting the Palestinians on a diet" — must be halted immediately. In this connection, Israel's tightened control over the Karni crossing, the only commercial crossing for the import and export of goods to Gaza, must be lifted, as it is in clear violation of the Agreement on Movement and Access brokered by United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Quartet envoy James Wolfensohn with the Palestinian Authority and Israel on 15 November 2005. This Agreement stipulates that the passage will operate continuously. We call on the international community to compel Israel to lift its strangulation of the Gaza Strip, since it has dangerous economic, social and health implications for an already impoverished people.

It is high time for the international community to take urgent measures to address this ongoing tragedy. The United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects. The Security Council must take the lead in this regard. The Council must take bold and courageous actions to ensure Israel's compliance with its resolutions and its adherence to international law. Such a position by the Council would greatly contribute to bringing an end to the cycle of violence and bloodshed that has prevented the two peoples — the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples — and the entire region from attaining genuine peace, freedom and security.

The Arab countries, including Palestine, have spoken clearly. Their hand of peace has been extended. There is a partner, in spite of Israeli assertions to the contrary. Israel must not be allowed to use this excuse — or any excuse, for that matter — to pursue its unilateral actions by further entrenching its occupation and colonization of more Palestinian land. The time has come for Israel to embark genuinely on ending its occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory in order to pave the way for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and for a just solution to the Palestine refugee problem.

On this day, as we commemorate Land Day, Palestinians everywhere join hand in hand in the same struggle against occupation, oppression and subjugation, and in favour of peace, justice, self-determination and national liberation. The time is long overdue for these hopes and rights to be realized.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Carmon (Israel) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, allow me to express my delegation's satisfaction at seeing you presiding over the Council.

(*spoke in English*)

Allow me at the outset also to congratulate you on your able leadership over the sensitive deliberations of the Security Council as President for the month of March.

In recent weeks, and as recently as the day before yesterday, the world witnessed two major political events in the Middle East: elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council and Israel's parliamentary elections. Both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, at this important and decisive juncture, have chosen who will be their respective leaders.

The results of these elections clearly show that the Israeli people chose peace. Israel remains committed to the two-State solution, as envisioned in the road map, where Israelis and Palestinians will be able to live side by side in peace and security. The chosen leadership of the Palestinian people, on the other hand, is comprised of the Hamas terrorist organization, leaving much less room for optimism.

We in Israel yearn for a Palestinian partner with whom we can jointly pursue the road towards peace. Yet on the Palestinian side, Hamas does not even recognize Israel and has not renounced terrorism and violence as a means to achieve its goals. In Israel, the elections underscore a longstanding commitment to international agreements. Yet on the Palestinian side, Hamas has vowed to accept only those agreements that match its narrow interests.

Israel remains committed to the road map, with progression based on the fulfilment of successive benchmarks. We believe it is the best way to advance towards a peaceful outcome of this conflict. Unfortunately, as of yet, our Palestinian neighbours have failed to carry out even the first requirement — to fight terrorism and begin to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure.

Acts of terrorism have continued to create a dire situation in the Middle East. On Tuesday, the very day of our national elections, the Islamic Jihad fired a 122-millimetre Katyusha rocket into Israel. That was the first time such a weapon was ever used by a Palestinian terror organization, representing what may be a new stage in their terrorist war against Israel. Since then, the Islamic Jihad declared that it possesses many more Katyusha rockets and intends to use them, too. Just yesterday, security forces arrested a suicide bomber wearing a five-kilo explosive belt at a checkpoint in the Jordan Valley. Last week, two additional suicide bombers attempted to enter major population centres in Israel for a mass murder of innocent people. Israel's security forces faced more than 50 daily alerts of terror attacks in the period prior to the national elections. Security forces prevented and pre-empted the worst of these. Ultimately, however, the difference between a failed attack and the scene of horrific death lies in the smallest, most miniscule fractions.

Israel has reason to believe that the situation might deteriorate now that Hamas has assumed the political helm of the Palestinian Authority, unless radical change is made to its charter, which is clearly committed to Israel's destruction, and to its approach to Israel and what it stands for.

Only last week, Hamas officials stated that they would not arrest terrorists who attack Israel. One of Hamas's first public statements after winning the Palestinian elections was that it would liberate the terrorists who assassinated Israeli Minister of Tourism Rechavam Ze'evi, defying the international agreement reached in April 2002 with the United States and the

United Kingdom. The Palestinian Authority consistently failed to ensure the safety of American and British international monitors, violating the agreement and forcing the monitors to evacuate. Israel, therefore, was left with no choice but to detain those terrorists before they were released. We cannot allow those who are involved in murder and terrorism to roam free. Nevertheless, Israel will handle the detainees in accordance with the relevant legal procedures and appropriate judicial oversight.

We in Israel face a constant dilemma: safeguarding the security and well-being of our citizens while at the same time minimizing any humanitarian hardships that may affect the Palestinians as a result of terrorism prevention.

Israel was recently forced to close the Karni crossing — a vital channel for food and goods to enter the Gaza Strip — as a result of direct threats of terrorism. These alerts represent an example of occasions when Palestinian extremists have harmed the lives of other Palestinians. Israel provided the Palestinian Authority with names of specific individuals who had threatened attacks, yet the Palestinian Authority failed to arrest them. We also proposed an alternative crossing to be used while Karni was under threat, yet the Palestinian Authority refused to fully utilize that alternative, undoubtedly for political reasons and at great expense to Palestinians' well-being.

I am glad to report to the Council that, as of 23 March, when the security situation permitted it, the Karni crossing was reopened. Hundreds of truckloads of food, goods and commercial items have been transported to and from the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, there has been continuous cooperation with our Palestinian neighbours on many civilian matters, which can be witnessed even this week as we have worked together to fight the spread of the avian flu virus.

We are doing everything in our power to ensure that the Palestinian people receive all needed humanitarian assistance. There is no starvation policy, as previously stated. We would like to find a solution that will end their suffering and improve their economy. However, we cannot compromise our security. Our foremost priority — as it is for every single responsible Government — is to protect our citizens.

That is a glance at the complexity of our relations with our Palestinian neighbours.

The role of Hamas and Palestinian terrorism is only one aspect of the situation in the Middle East. The terror organizations that perpetrate these crimes are headquartered in Damascus and are financed by the Islamic Republic of Iran — the same United Nations Member State whose President recently called for the destruction of Israel and is attempting to develop the capabilities to do so. The alliance among Iran, Syria and Palestinian terrorist organizations — a real axis of terror — poses grave dangers to security and stability in the Middle East and beyond. As we sit here today, the next terror attack against Israel is being financed and planned and is nearing execution. Today, on 30 March, Israel has registered 69 terror alerts, 13 of which represent specific threats.

I now turn to Israel's north. Citizens continue to face a dangerous and persisting existential threat because of Hizbullah terrorists, who continue to wage Iran's and Syria's war by proxy along the northern border. There have been daily alerts suggesting Hizbullah plans to kidnap more soldiers and fire more rockets into Israel.

We are deeply concerned by Hizbullah's continuous presence on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, despite Security Council resolutions 425 (1978), 1559 (2004) and 1655 (2006), which call for the Government of Lebanon to exercise full jurisdiction over its territory up to the Blue Line and to take immediate steps to prevent further terrorist attacks from Lebanon. Almost six years ago, the State of Israel fulfilled its obligations as set out in resolution 425 (1978), yet year after year Hizbullah operates freely along the border. This is a matter of great concern.

However, we would like to welcome the launching of the national dialogue within Lebanon, and we hope it will lead to the exercise of the sovereignty of the Government of Lebanon over all its territory, including the dismantling of the terrorist organizations active on its soil.

We call on the international community to continue its fight against terrorism in order to remove this treacherous component from the complicated relations with our neighbours. In that regard, Israel appreciates the international community's continued insistence — as reflected in various official statements, including those of the Quartet — that the new Palestinian Government abide by three basic requirements: recognize Israel, abandon violence and terrorism, and comply with previous

agreements with Israel. Only after these three conditions are met can Israel negotiate with the Palestinian Authority. We call on the international community to continue to make strict demands on Hamas to comply with these three fundamental benchmarks that the international community has itself set.

The Israeli people have great hope in the vision of the road map, as reflected in this week's elections. We hope that, through the international community's help, we will find a genuine partner in the Palestinian Government so that our peoples can work together towards fulfilling the road map and living side by side in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the statesmanship and professionalism of your presidency of the Security Council during the month of March. I should also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador John Bolton, for his efforts during his Council presidency last month.

We meet today at a time when the Middle East region is witnessing accelerating crises. In Iraq, there are unstable security and political conditions; in the occupied Palestinian territory, there are daily Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people; and in Lebanon, which has long endured Israeli occupation of its lands, there are thousands of Palestinian refugees who were expelled from their land and their homes.

Following last year's free parliamentary elections and the formation of the Government of President Fouad Siniora, Lebanon is on the road to full sovereignty, securing its freedom, building its institutions and promoting a culture of democracy. Perhaps the most notable of these democratic activities is the national dialogue currently taking place among various political groups with the confidence and encouragement of the international community.

During the first meetings of the dialogue, agreement was reached on the need to support the international investigation into the crime of the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and his colleagues, and on the need to create an international tribunal to punish those involved in that crime. It was also agreed that the Shab'a farms and the Kafr Shuba hills occupied by Israel must be recovered and that the Lebanese Government must take the necessary steps to ensure the Lebanese character of Shab'a farms, in accordance with United Nations procedures. Those participating in the dialogue also agreed that sovereign relations must be established with sisterly States.

The Lebanese Government, in cooperation with the international community, has adopted a comprehensive approach with regard to Palestinian refugees. The Lebanese people reject naturalization, and we reaffirm their right to return to their homes in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Concerning Palestinian weapons, we have decided to address that issue through dialogue, while reaffirming that the Palestinian Government must exercise full sovereignty over all its land.

Lebanon is suffering from Israel's continued policy of threatening our sovereignty and from its continuing breaches of the sanctity of Lebanese land and airspace. We call on the international community to shoulder its responsibility and move immediately to demand that Israel put an end to these aggressive practices.

Lebanon calls on the international community to demand the release of all Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails and to compel Israel to provide to the United Nations all maps of mines left by its armed forces during its occupation of Lebanese land.

Our respect for democratic values and principles compels us to respect the democratic choice of the Palestinian people and to call for preventing any collective punishment of them because of their choice. The arbitrary measures taken by Israel against Palestinian citizens such as closing harbours and crossing points, freezing assets, withholding all other aid, acts of assassination, violation of Palestinian sovereignty and others, including the raid of the Jericho prison and the detention of detainees from that prison, as well as the continuing building and expansion of settlements and the wall, call us to demand in today's meeting that the international community pressure Israel to cease and desist in the building and expansion of settlements and prevent it from continuing to build the separation wall, in accordance with the decision by the International Court of Justice. The international community should also urge Israel to withdraw from all occupied Palestinian territory and respect the principles upheld by the international community.

Arabs have made peace as a strategic choice and have worked towards it. The Israeli party must rise to this choice in order to achieve a just, comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the principle of land for peace, the principles of the Madrid Conference and resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Beirut summit of 2002 and since reaffirmed by the Arab summit of Khartoum, which concluded on 29 March 2006.

Peace is a collective responsibility, and with good will the page of the past can be turned towards a better future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Atieh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We had hoped that the Security Council would give the opportunity to all delegations that wished to express their opinion to it on the tragic situation in this most important and sensitive region of the world.

The Middle East region has witnessed continued instability and tension for more than six decades now because of the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab land and the consequent killing, dispersion of people, destruction of infrastructure, extrajudicial killing, the policy of closure and siege — all within a premeditated policy to oppress Arab peoples in their occupied territory and to humiliate them, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Arbitrary Israeli practices in the occupied Arab lands fall under the rubric of war crimes and terrorism, for which Israel must be held accountable under international law. The daily activities by the Israeli occupation forces, attacks with tanks, helicopters and rockets against the defenseless Palestinian people are glaring proof of this.

Israel's attempts to spread accusations randomly against others are desperate attempts to hoodwink and to keep the world occupied elsewhere, ignoring its crimes against the rights of the Palestinian people, crimes even against women and children. The claim by the representative of Israel that Damascus hosts a number of terrorist organizations is blatantly untrue. Palestinians in Syria are refugees, victims of Israeli occupation to whom Israel denies the right of return to their land in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

Syria looks towards a just, comprehensive peace and rejects such attempts. However, we have fallen victim to treacherous alliances attempting to push the region towards further collapse and tension.

Since this Organization was formed, Arab States have pinned great hopes on it to find a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nevertheless, and regrettably, Israel did not heed the will of the international community, despite dozens of resolutions adopted by this Council, let alone the hundreds of General Assembly resolutions, all calling upon Israel to end its occupation of Arab lands and withdraw to the line of 4 June 1967.

In 1981 the Security Council adopted resolution 497 (1981), which considered Israel's decision to annex the Golan as null and void. The General Assembly has adopted dozens of resolutions condemning all measures and practices by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at changing the nature of the occupied Syrian Golan and considered them null and void and a flagrant violation of international law and the Geneva Conventions.

Challenging the resolutions of international legitimacy, Israel expelled about a half million Syrians from their lands. Dozens have been detained, and some have now been in jail for more than thirty years. Israel continues to plan for building further settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan. The question is: if Israel claims that withdrawing its settlers is painful, if it is truly genuine in wanting peace in the region, why does it continue to build settlements and attract more settlers to occupied Arab, Syrian and Palestinian lands? Statements repeated over and over by Israeli officials that they do not intend to withdraw from the Syrian Golan clearly show Israel's premeditated decision to continue to occupy Syrian lands and that it does not wish to obtain a just, comprehensive peace in the region. Syria has made every effort possible towards a just, comprehensive peace in the region. Syria has repeatedly declared its willingness to resume the peace process unconditionally, while taking into consideration that calls for implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy do not create preconditions.

Nevertheless, Israel has responded to all these calls with more rejection, continued occupation and defiance of international legitimacy. We wish to stress that peace in the region of the Middle East, as desired by the international community, will not be achieved unless and until Israel heeds the resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference; unless and until it accepts the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit and reaffirmed by all subsequent summits, including the latest, just concluded yesterday in Khartoum.

The tragic conditions in the occupied Palestinian lands are worsening daily because of Israeli military practices in those areas. The international community must put an end those arbitrary Israeli practices, which deny the Palestinian people their most basic rights — the right to life and to self-determination. The Palestinian people exercised their democratic right in the legislative elections, which were transparent and fair. The international community must respect the will of the people in choosing their leaders; it must not interfere in their internal affairs and certainly must not punish them politically and economically because they have exercised their rights. Unilateral actions that the Israeli Government intends will destroy the peace process in the region and will create a new situation on the ground, again against United Nations resolutions.

On the other hand, Israel's ongoing construction of illegal settlements and the wall on Palestinian lands will lead only to further suffering by the Palestinian people. It means new borders imposed on the future Palestinian State. We call on the international community to act to compel Israel to remove illegal settlements and the separation wall immediately.

My delegation stresses again that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East will be achieved only by a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab lands — including the Syrian Golan, the Shab'a Farms in Lebanon and Palestinian lands — to the borders of 4 June 1967. Stability and security in the region are hostage to Israel's willingness to commit unconditionally to the principle of non-acquisition of the land of others by force, and to implement decisions of international legitimacy and to accept the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh for his comprehensive briefing today.

Greece fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, and thus I shall be brief.

It is clear that recent developments in the region, most notably the January elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council and Tuesday's elections in Israel, may mark the dawning of a new political era in the Middle East. All stakeholders are well aware of the challenges and also of the opportunities that this new era holds.

Greece remains committed to striving for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as on the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace. We remain committed to the realization of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is evident that in order for there to be a negotiated peace, both sides need credible interlocutors who are willing to approach talks in good faith and on the basis of mutual respect and recognition.

In this regard, we would like to emphasize that all democratically elected Governments should adhere to certain fundamental, universal principles, which include, above all, adherence to the rule of law.

The international community expects the new Hamas-led Government to renounce violence and to disarm, to recognize Israel's right to exist and to respect all previous agreements and understandings, including the road map. The Palestinian Government will be held accountable against these standards, not only by the international community, but also by the Palestinian people themselves.

At the same time, we call upon the new Israeli Government that will be formed in the coming days to adhere to Israel's obligations under the road map and to refrain from any unilateral actions that may prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations and render the two-State solution physically impossible to implement.

We expect all concerned to demonstrate political maturity and wisdom, to refrain from provocative

actions and rhetoric and to seize the opportunity so that the fate and future of their respective peoples may finally be one of peace, optimism and prosperity.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his briefing on developments in the Middle East last month.

Regarding the statement to be made in this meeting by the Non-Aligned group, we wish to note that that statement does not reflect Peru's position, which is the position of the Quartet concerning the attitude that should be taken by the new Palestinian Government.

Peru has fought against terrorism successfully for 13 years. It has that terrible experience, and for that reason it condemns terrorism energetically and unequivocally in all its forms and manifestations, wherever and by whomever committed.

Faithful to these principles, Peru supports the conditions that were set by the Quartet on 30 January for the new Palestinian Government formed by Hamas, requiring it to renounce violence, to recognize Israel and to undertake the commitments of the previous Palestinian Authority, including the road map. To date, Hamas has not responded concerning those crucial Quartet requirements — which, moreover, have been reflected in a presidential statement of the Security Council.

This uncertainty hampers the negotiations between the parties, for one party does not recognize the other. Thus there can be no direct negotiations, as required by the Quartet and by the road map. This blocks the possibility of a negotiated settlement to bring about the coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace side by side and within secure and internationally recognized borders. As was pointed out in the presidential statement that the Council adopted on 3 February (S/PRST/2006/6), those criteria will also be applied by the major donors when they consider future assistance to be extended to the new Palestinian Government.

Given those circumstances, we must consider how best to channel and optimize assistance to the Palestinian people, especially humanitarian assistance, including that provided by the United Nations. We must prevent the Palestinian people living in the occupied territories from being left defenceless, while not jeopardizing the principles and resolutions adopted by the Council relating to counter-terrorism.

There can be no doubt that the current uncertainty and the lack of negotiations are likely to aggravate the situation and prompt unilateral acts and violence with unforeseeable consequences. In order to prevent such a scenario, a radical change must take place, involving recognition, negotiations and an end to the occupation of the territories. The effecting of such a change — which is an historic responsibility — is now in the hands of the new administration of the Palestinian Government and of the newly elected Government of Israel.

Steadfast adherence on the part of the new Palestinian Government to the principles set forth by the Quartet — above all, recognition of Israel, the renunciation of violence and the acceptance of the agreements and obligations entered into by the Palestinian Authority in the past — is essential in order to begin to remedy the dangerous situation of uncertainty and to return to the path of negotiations, which will make it possible for the Palestinian people to fulfil their aspirations to build their State and to live in peace.

Peru has always supported, and will continue to support, unswervingly, the Palestinian people, with a view to the establishment of a viable and democratic national State, in keeping with the road map — that is, through negotiations.

Before concluding, I would like briefly to refer to the situation in Lebanon and to the resolution that we adopted yesterday requesting the Secretary-General to negotiate with the Lebanese Government an agreement for the creation of an international tribunal to try those responsible for the terrorist assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 22 others.

My delegation joined the consensus in supporting the creation of the tribunal, as requested by the Government of Lebanon. We also appreciate the progress made by the International Independent Investigation Commission in shedding light on that crime. We trust that, given the cooperation that it has been offered, the Commission will be able to identify the perpetrators and conclude the investigation within a reasonable time period, as set out by Commissioner Brammertz, speaking in this Chamber.

The results of the investigation carried out by the International Commission must serve as the basis for the work of the international tribunal that is to be set up. We would like to express our preference that, in its

composition and powers, the tribunal have the greatest possible Lebanese component. We believe that necessity is in keeping with the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004), which calls for the re-establishment of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and total political independence of Lebanon. The restoration of the rule of law and the strengthening of a Lebanese judicial system capable of administrating justice represent, without question, a pillar of resolution 1559 (2004). We believe that the tribunal should also provide encouragement to Lebanon to fully shoulder its responsibilities.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh for his briefing.

The United States remains committed to President Bush's vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The road map imposes a phased series of obligations on both sides to take concrete steps to create the necessary conditions to permit final status talks to go forward. Partnership between the parties is a critical element. Just as Israel has obligations under the road map, so, too, do the Palestinians.

The international community has made clear that a new Palestinian Authority Government must disavow terror and violence, recognize Israel's right to exist and accept previous obligations and agreements between the parties. That was the position taken by the Quartet in their statement of 30 January.

Those requirements are based upon long-standing principles and are applicable to any Palestinian Government. However, as Secretary Rice has said, Hamas, as the majority party in the new Palestinian Legislative Council, will now have to bear responsibility for the decisions it makes and face up to the consequences of those decisions, which will shape the international community's approach to issues involving the Palestinians and regional peacemaking efforts.

On the Israeli side, we note acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's remarks on 28 March, following his party's success in the Israeli elections, calling for a return to negotiations and declaring that Israel is ready to compromise for the sake of peace.

We will continue to judge Hamas by its actions, not its words. We have seen nothing that would cause us to change our position towards Hamas — a designated foreign terrorist organization, under United States law, that is responsible for the murder of hundreds of innocent civilians, has long been an enemy of peace in the region and has harmed the Palestinian people's aspirations for statehood.

Our position and that of the Quartet is consistent: future assistance to the new Palestinian Authority Government will be reviewed against that Government's commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations. We would expect that measures would be in place to ensure that any such assistance could not be used by those affiliated with a foreign terrorist organization.

I noted this morning the remarks of new Foreign Minister Mahmoud Zahar, who said, "America is committing big crimes against the Arab and Islamic countries". Obviously, we unequivocally reject that proposition. I would also note to Foreign Minister Zahar that casual slander is an inauspicious way to begin.

As noted in the 30 January Quartet statement, we also remain concerned about the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. The United States has long been a supporter of the Palestinian people through substantial contributions of our foreign assistance funds. The United States continues to be devoted to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, and we shall remain so. We firmly believe that it is important for the people in the Palestinian territories that they should have a chance to enjoy lives that include safety, security, and economic well-being.

Until now, United States Security Coordinator Dayton's focus has been on frequent and direct coordination between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian Security Forces, including on such issues as the Gaza border crossings and continuous liaison with the Palestinian and Israeli security leadership. With a new Palestinian Authority Government taking power, General Dayton will have no contact with Palestinian security forces who report to any members of a Hamas-led cabinet. General Dayton's role will be redefined in the light of changing circumstances.

The road map requires obligations from both parties. We believe it is important that there be a Palestinian partner for peace, and in that context we have welcomed President Abbas' commitment to pursuing such an agenda. We remain in ongoing discussions with our colleagues in the Quartet regarding the way forward, and we will continue to discuss the best means to support the Palestinian people.

Mr. Manongi (United Republic of Tanzania): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Kalomoh, for his briefing.

At the outset, Mr. President, permit me to associate the United Republic of Tanzania with the statement to be made by the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Ambassador Hamidon Ali, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Since the last briefing, much has happened in the Middle East. Key developments on the political front have been the formation and the swearing-in of a Hamas-led Government on the one hand, and on the other, the successful conduct of Israeli elections, won by Mr. Ehud Olmert's Kadima party. These developments are an important aspect of the political landscape, and it is important that both Israelis and the Palestinians in the region recognize this. We urge that these delicate moments of change be met patiently and calmly by both sides. The end of the electoral season should provide a possibility for focusing seriously on a better future for both Palestinians and Israelis, who have been living in violence, instability and fear for so many years and who are still desperately waiting for peace.

It is our strong belief that the Hamas-led Government, which was sworn in yesterday, will be able to come to terms with the new realities of the region and decide once and for all to disarm, renounce violence, recognize Israel and sign up to past peace agreements as a sure way of removing a major hurdle in the peace process. Prime Minister Ismail Haniya should recognize the imperative of a two-State solution, where Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security.

On its part, any new Kadima-led Government in Israel must also come to terms with the new realities and prepare to work with the Hamas-led Government as their new negotiating partner. They need to freeze settlement activity, stop barrier construction and end attacks on Palestinians. Hurried unilateral actions by Israel in trying to fix its borders will not bring about peace.

We are deeply concerned over the recent upsurge in violence in the West Bank and Gaza. We call for the new leadership to exercise restraint and patience and take deliberate measures to reduce tensions in this area and restore calm. The parties should appreciate the delicate nature of the situation and seek to work closely together for a lasting solution to the challenges they face.

We are encouraged by the efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, who on 16 March met with members of the diplomatic Quartet in Brussels to discuss assistance to the Palestinian Authority. It is our view that the international community should continue to be fully involved, despite the difficult stage that the peace process has reached. Efforts should focus on impressing upon the parties that unilateral actions will not work and that negotiations provide the only credible alternative for a viable solution.

It is also our view that blocking the flow of funds and resources to the Palestinians will only make matters worse and increase the suffering of many innocent people. Such actions must be discouraged.

Finally, we believe that the international peace plan — the road map — should be given a renewed chance in these changed circumstances.

Mr. Gayama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, my delegation is grateful to you for having included on the Security Council's agenda this public debate on the overall situation in the Middle East at a particular point in time marked by the recent legislative elections in both Palestine and in Israel, and also by the latest developments in the situation in Lebanon.

With respect to the legislative elections in Palestine and Israel, we commend the two peoples for the democratic choices they have just made, calmly and in accepting the outcome of the vote by the electorate. My delegation has an unspoken hope that the new political paradigm thus expressed will lead beyond the appearances and political posturing that have been greatly deplored recently to movement towards the objective that is set forth in the road map, which is ultimately to create a Palestinian State living

side by side with Israel in peace and security. This is why my delegation urges both parties to undertake dialogue and negotiation on the road map, the only credible alternative to violence.

Indeed, occupation is intolerable and always carries within it the seeds of violence and suffering, but it is urgent to exit this cycle of violence and repression and to opt resolutely and responsibly for negotiation within respect for international law. The latest statements of key Israeli and Palestinian political officials provide us some glimmer of hope, although there are certain conditions. My delegation, however, strongly encourages both parties to create conditions for a dialogue and negotiation.

To do this, it would be desirable that confidence-building measures be established through, on the one hand, recognizing Israel, accepting the agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and renouncing violence, and on the other hand, ending unilateral acts and the policy of a fait accompli, dismantling settlements that are disputed and ending the building of the separation wall, targeted assassinations and acts of collective punishment.

Now is the time to call upon the international community to support the peace plan in Palestine, particularly the efforts of the international Quartet and the other players in the Middle East crisis. My delegation also believes that the Palestinian people, who are experiencing very difficult living conditions, should not be left on their own and that the primary donors need to continue to provide humanitarian assistance and emergency assistance to them under these difficult circumstances.

On Lebanon, my delegation welcomes the fact that the political leaders of that country have decided to overcome their infighting via national dialogue. We welcome the significant progress they have made in restoring the sovereignty of the Lebanese people throughout their territory.

My delegation strongly encourages the Lebanese people to find consensual solutions to the other problems that remain unresolved. We take note of the developments related to the work of the International Independent Investigation Commission. We welcome the cooperation between the Commission and the Lebanese authorities, as well as the easing of tension in the relations between the Commission and the Syrian authorities.

My delegation supports the plan to establish an international tribunal to prosecute those responsible for the bomb attack that took the lives of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 22 other persons on 14 February 2005.

Finally, we express our deep concern at the tense situation that continues in southern Lebanon, marked by repeated violations of the ceasefire agreement by various actors and violations of Lebanese airspace. At the same time, we welcome the commendable efforts carried out in that area by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

I cannot conclude without thanking the Assistant Secretary-General for the quality of his briefing, which has helped to update us on the item under consideration.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Kalomoh for his comprehensive briefing.

Today's meeting is taking place against the backdrop of important events in the Middle East region. I am thinking in particular of the outcome of the elections in Israel and the completion of the efforts to form a new Palestinian Government.

In analysing the changes that have taken place in Palestinian territories, Russia expresses its hope that the Government of the Palestinian National Authority will pursue a policy that serves the vital interests of all Palestinians by fulfilling their aspirations to peace and nationhood. Such a policy must be based on the principles agreed within the framework of the Quartet of international mediators. Those principles provide for a renunciation of violence as a means to achieve political goals, the recognition of Israel's right to exist, and compliance with previous agreements and commitments, in particular the road map, whose implementation is the most reliable path towards a just resolution of the Palestinian issue. Russia will continue to assist energetically in that regard.

We welcome the stated intention of Mr. Haniyeh, the Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority, to conduct his relationship with President Abbas in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation. It is important that such cooperation be carried out within the constitutional framework on the basis of the authority set forth in the laws of the Palestinian Authority and the principle of power-sharing.

It is worth noting that the new Cabinet Ministers of the Palestinian National Authority recognize the role of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the leading faction among the remaining national movements. It is also particularly important that the Palestinian National Authority Government has reaffirmed its readiness to discuss all requirements and to provide the necessary safeguards to donors providing assistance to the Palestinian people.

We believe that there is a need to continue the basic approach, building upon the policy initiative of the President of Russia of dialogue with the Hamas movement and working closely with that organization so as to encourage it to fulfil the conditions set out by the Quartet. We do not share the view that it is impossible to work with the newly formed Government of the Palestinian National Authority in addressing issues related to providing assistance — including humanitarian assistance — to the Palestinians. The rejection of such assistance could be a serious error that would lead to chaos and unpredictable consequences and cause a grave humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories.

Instead of closing the door on the prospects for achieving peace in the region and punishing the Palestinians with sanctions and ultimatums for the democratic choice that they have made, we propose to focus on joint efforts to establish a mechanism that would ensure reliable monitoring of the provision of donor assistance. Such an effort could draw widely on the experience of United Nations specialized agencies and on the potential of the missions of the Quartet's Special Envoy, Mr. Wolfensohn.

Russia is resolved to carry out its commitments and to address the issue of providing the Palestinian National Authority with financial assistance totalling $10 million under conditions of full transparency and openness.

We expect any Government formed on the basis of the outcome of the Israeli elections not to undertake unilateral steps with respect to the Palestinians or to prejudice the outcome of the talks on the final status of the Palestinian territories. We note with satisfaction the statement of the Acting Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Olmert, regarding his country's readiness to resume talks with the Palestinians on settlement issues. That statement is in keeping with the previously stated desire of the head of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr. Abbas, to continue the peace dialogue with the Israeli leadership, and it establishes a good basis for further peaceful efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the road map.

It is also important to ensure prompt resumption of the negotiating process on the Syrian-Lebanese track of the Middle East peace process. The Security Council will soon have an opportunity to look at that issue in greater detail. Today, we would simply like to highlight in particular the importance of continuing the inter-Lebanese dialogue and of achieving a consensus within that framework on the most pressing issues related to ensuring peace and stability in Lebanon and the entire region.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Permit me at the outset to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. It is of particular importance, not only because it keeps Council members updated on the events taking place in a region at the centre of the world's attention, but also because it gives expression to the Council's concern over the situation in the Middle East and its serious desire to bring about a comprehensive and lasting peace in that region. We therefore appreciate the holding of this plenary meeting.

In that regard, I would be remiss if I failed to thank His Excellency Mr. Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statements to be made later by the representatives of the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The importance of this meeting lies in its timing. It is being held at a time when the region is witnessing political changes — whether they be in the Palestinian political arena under the new Government or in the light of the outcome of the Israeli elections — not to mention the events on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

The State of Qatar strongly believes in the peaceful settlement of disputes and is of the view that violence and counter-violence will not lead to a solution, but will only serve to heighten tension and instability in the entire Middle East region. In addition, violence undermines the prospects of the peace process and exacerbates extremism and terrorism instead of supporting the peace process. Indeed, the peace process

is the only means to establish a comprehensive peace in the region — a peace that must be built on the foundation of international legality and must provide security, stability and peaceful coexistence for the region's peoples.

In the light of those principles, we would like to reaffirm the following points.

First, early this year, we witnessed a very important event: the Palestinian Legislative Council elections. Those elections reflected the free will of the Palestinian people, who exercised their democratic right by participating in them. Given our belief that the peace process must continue, we emphasize that all parties must respect the outcome of the constitutional process and must respect the authorities elected by the Palestinian people.

The Israeli decision to halt the transfer of taxes due to the Palestinian side should thus be viewed as punishment for the Palestinian people for exercising their right. This is of particular importance because those revenues belong to the Palestinian people and because failure to transfer them constitutes a violation of the Protocol signed between the two parties in Paris in 1994. This measure will only exacerbate the situation and obstruct the implementation of the road map. We therefore call on the international community to continue providing financial and economic assistance and grants to the Palestinian National Authority so as to avoid any dangerous repercussions on the day-to-day life of the Palestinian people.

Secondly, no settlement of the Palestinian question can be comprehensive and sustainable if it is based on unilateral measures. Such measures run counter to the terms of reference and the foundations on which the peace process was built. The solution must be the result of a negotiated agreement between the two parties.

Thirdly, the oppressive practices against civilians, extrajudicial killings and other illegal policies — including settlement construction and expansion, the continued construction of the separation wall and the isolation and separation of Palestinian towns and villages — ultimately hinder peace efforts and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. Such measures also increase the daily suffering and hardships of the Palestinian people. The most recent example of such measures was the storming of the Jericho municipal complex and the detention of its prisoners, which constituted a violation of the agreement that Israel concluded with the Palestinian Authority in 2002.

Fourthly, the changes in the Governments of the two parties has put the Middle East on the threshold of a new historical stage that will determine the fate of the region: either a return to the negotiating table or further suffering and hardship for the peoples of the region. The main actors must now take advantage of those changes to better serve the peace process. Since the Security Council has repeatedly called for the establishment of a democratic, viable and sovereign Palestinian State that can live side by side with Israel in peace and security, the Security Council and the international community, particularly the co-sponsors of the peace process and the Quartet, must exert further efforts to resume the peace process on the basis of the agreed terms of reference, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, and the Arab peace initiative endorsed by the Beirut summit and reiterated by the Arab leaders at Khartoum.

The State of Qatar renews its support for the Palestinian Authority in its quest to fulfil the aspirations of its people. We therefore urge the parties concerned to shoulder their responsibilities and return to the negotiating table. We also call upon the Israeli Government to approach the peace process seriously and withdraw to the borders of 4 June 1967. We believe that the main reason for the conflict is the continued illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. The international community must realize that as well.

Israel must also withdraw from the Lebanese farms and cease its violations of the Blue Line, because this need to end occupation also applies to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, which cannot be separated from the Palestinian question if we are to reach a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I would like to fully associate Denmark with the statement of the European Union to be delivered later by the representative of Austria.

First of all, let me thank Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh for his comprehensive briefing and comments.

Times are changing in the Middle East. New Governments will be emerging in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It is our strong hope that both Governments will live up to their commitments, including the road map, and will thus help ensure that Israelis and Palestinians may live together peacefully, side by side.

We hope that the new Government that has been formed in the Palestinian territories will address the Palestinian people's aspirations for peace and statehood that have been so strongly articulated by President Abbas. We thus expect the Palestinian Government to fulfil the obligations entered into by the Palestinian Authority. Violence and terror are incompatible with democratic processes. In accordance with the Quartet's statement of 30 January, "all members of [the] Palestinian Government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map". Clearly, those conditions remain unchanged.

We have noted that Prime Minister Haniyeh has expressed his wish to enter into a dialogue with the Middle East Quartet. Although Hamas has clearly undergone some change, as evidenced by its de facto observance of a ceasefire and its participation in the elections, it does, however, remain to be seen whether this transformation is irreversible and continues in the right direction. Moreover, we expect the new Government to be committed to the rule of law, reform and sound fiscal management, and to prevent terrorist attacks and dismantle the infrastructure of terror.

Ways must be found to continue to support the Palestinian people. Modalities for provision of international assistance are currently being analysed. It would not be fair, or indeed in accordance with the ideals that we want to take hold in the Middle East, to punish the Palestinian people for exercising their democratic rights. A functioning Palestinian Authority, including stable Palestinian institutions, is essential both for the well-being of the Palestinian people and for the creation of a viable Palestinian State.

In February 2006, the European Union decided to provide around $143 million in emergency assistance to the Palestinians. The provision of future assistance is now being analysed.

Denmark stands ready to continue to support Palestinian economic development and democratic State-building. An economic collapse of the Palestinian Authority is in nobody's interest.

Election results in Israel are just in. We would like to use this opportunity to remind Israel, and the new Government to be formed after the elections, that in the light of the continued creation of facts on the ground peace cannot be imposed unilaterally and that durable peace cannot be achieved outside the regional framework of the Middle East peace process.

Both Israel and the Palestinians should adhere to their obligations under the road map and avoid unilateral actions, which prejudice final status issues. Construction of settlement outposts constitutes such action. Moreover, impediments to Palestinian economic life must be removed. The separation barrier cuts off the movement of people and goods. The Movement and Access Agreement must be respected and the border crossings, including Karni, must be remain open.

The final aim of the Middle East peace process remains unchanged, that is, in accordance with the road map, a negotiated two-State solution with Israel and Palestinians living side by side in peaceful coexistence.

As regards the situation in Lebanon, Denmark welcomes the launching of a national dialogue. We hope this dialogue will continue and will contribute to stability in the country. As also underlined by the Security Council on numerous occasions, we support Lebanon's unity, stability and independence and remind Lebanon's neighbours of their obligation to respect Lebanon's sovereignty. We are encouraged by the fact that the situation along the Blue Line has remained quiet recently.

Denmark also welcomes the progress achieved so far by the special International Independent Investigation Commission into the murder of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. As Mr. Brammertz said to the Council two weeks ago (see S/PV.5388), the investigation is making progress. In order to complete the investigation and to ensure that justice is served, the full and unconditional cooperation of all relevant parties is needed.

Resolution 1664 (2006), adopted yesterday, requests the Secretary-General to negotiate an agreement with the Government of Lebanon aimed at establishing a tribunal of an international character to

try those eventually charged with involvement in that terrorist attack. We welcome that process.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like first of all to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh for his informative briefing.

The past month has witnessed the beginning of an unprecedented new phase in the situation between Israel and Palestine. A new Hamas-led Government was established, and the Kadima party won the parliamentary election in Israel. Those developments are reflections of the will of the peoples of Palestine and Israel. The international community should respect the democratic choices made by the peoples of Palestine and Israel.

After years of bloodshed and conflict, the peoples of Palestine and Israel earnestly yearn for the early start of a life of peace and stability. The Governments and their leaders on both sides have accepted such choices for a peaceful settlement. The sticking point at present is that the two sides have yet to establish mutual trust, the lack of which leads to turbulence in the security situation and to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation. It also results in great harm and injury to the general population and has a direct impact on the peace and stability of the Middle East region as a whole. This situation must be resolved. In China's view, since it is a matter of fact that Israel exists as a State, it is understandable that it should have concerns about its security. At the same time, the basic rights of the Palestinians should be guaranteed. The reasonable demands of the Palestinians, such as the establishment of a State, should also be satisfied.

China has consistently stressed that the key to the settlement of the Middle East question is the establishment of mutual trust between Israel and Palestine, the renunciation of violence and the search, through peaceful negotiation, for a settlement which is truly in the fundamental interests of the peoples.

The road map for peace in the Middle East remains the most viable option for the settlement of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. It is our hope that the leadership on both sides will display statesmanship in their consideration of the various questions and resume their dialogue with a view to promoting the implementation of the road map so as to carry out the important tasks that history and their peoples have bestowed on them, and to live up to the ardent aspirations of their peoples and of the international community.

China follows developments in the Middle East situation with close interest and has always tried to promote the early establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It is our view that all agreements reached in the past should continue to be honoured and implemented. We greatly appreciate the positive indications given by President Abbas. At the same time, we believe that all of the resources belonging to Palestine should be returned to the people of Palestine in a timely manner, so as to improve the lives of the general population in Palestine. China will continue to work with various parties to promote negotiations and advocate peace so that the peace process in the Middle East can make positive headway.

We are pleased to note that, since the beginning of March, many rounds of national dialogue have been held in Lebanon and that certain basic agreements have been reached. We hope that that process will help all factions in Lebanon to reach consensus on major issues affecting the fate of the country. Yesterday, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1664 (2006), authorizing the Secretary-General to continue consultations with the Lebanese Government on the details relating to the establishment of a tribunal of an international character. We support the efforts of the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission, led by Mr. Brammertz, to complete, as soon as possible and in accordance with the authorization by the Security Council, the investigation into the assassination of Mr. Hariri, with a view to uncovering the truth and upholding justice for the victims. At the same time, we hope that the establishment of such a tribunal will facilitate the maintenance of peace and stability in Lebanon and in the Middle East as a whole.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Kalomoh, for his briefing and for his valuable observations.

Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. I will therefore limit my statement mainly to a number of points, made in our national capacity.

Slovakia remains strongly committed to the principles outlined in the road map. We take this

opportunity to reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict, based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and on negotiations between the two sides.

Slovakia supports the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To achieve progress in implementing the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, both parties must accept previous agreements and obligations, return to constructive dialogue and take concrete actions aimed at building and strengthening mutual confidence and trust.

For that reason, we believe that it remains necessary for the new Palestinian Government, formed and led by Hamas, to accept previous obligations and agreements, including the road map. In order to become a partner in the peace process, Hamas must recognize Israel's right to exist and renounce violence and terror. We are convinced that such a step would significantly contribute to creating the conditions necessary for the continuation of a dialogue on a resolution of the Middle East conflict.

In this regard, we support the efforts and leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas. We hope that he will continue to exercise his authority and that good working and personal relations will be established between him and the new Prime Minister and members of the Government, based on a mutual commitment to a platform of peace, including the principles of the road map and previous agreements and obligations.

We are also all aware of the developing difficulties about financial and material support to the Palestinian people, as well as to the Palestinian Authority. We wish to stress that we cannot and should not abandon the Palestinian people. We need to continue international humanitarian aid and to find the best way to do it effectively and transparently.

Two days ago Israeli voters approached polling stations to elect a new Knesset and to form a new Israeli Government. We share the view that the outgoing Israeli Government has taken decisions that were not easy and has implemented difficult steps towards peace in the region. We hope that the future Israeli Government will take advantage of and reinforce the peace momentum already gained. In this regard, we welcome the reconfirmed commitment of Prime Minister Olmert to peace in the Middle East. At the same time, we hope and expect that Israel will refrain from steps and activities that might be contradictory to the principles and agreements laid down in the road map and that might threaten the implementation of a solution based on the coexistence of two viable States.

As for daily developments on the ground, we remain concerned about the continuing violence and loss of innocent lives. We urge both parties to exercise utmost restraint.

With respect to Lebanon, Slovakia fully supports the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to extend their sovereignty and regain full control over the entire territory of the country. We perceive the completion of the investigation process into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri as imperative for the stabilization and reconciliation process, not only in Lebanon but also in the wider region. In this regard, Slovakia supports the creation of a tribunal of an international character that would bring the perpetrators to justice.

We welcome the ongoing efforts of the international community aimed at assisting Lebanon and helping it to overcome its difficult past. In this context, we fully support the work of the United Nations and its contribution to the process. We agree with Mr. Kalomoh's observation that the beginning of the national dialogue in Lebanon is a truly historic and positive development that should be commended and supported by the international community.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): I too thank Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East situation.

Peace and the peace process in the Middle East now face a new and truly challenging phase with the latest political developments in both Palestine and Israel. In this new situation, the possibilities for promoting peace are just as great if political wisdom, courage and restraint prevail, as is the danger for more peril and troubles if the contrary prevails. In this delicate situation in which the region now finds itself, the international community must do all it can to help promote the chances of better understanding, of cooperation and of peace.

Following the Palestinian Legislative Council election in January, the Japanese Government expressed its hope and expectations that Hamas, having

been elected through the democratic process to the position of the leading party, would be ready to take the commensurate governing responsibility, and that it would adopt a policy of peace and peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity with Israel. With the swearing-in of the new Government of the Palestinian Authority, led by Hamas, Japan strongly expects that the new Government will unequivocally repudiate violence and make efforts to advance the peace process in accordance with the existing agreements, including the road map.

On the Israeli side, Japan expects that its new Government, which will be formed following the Knesset elections held on 28 March, will continue its efforts to realize peace with the Palestinians by placing the advancement of harmony and peace as a top priority in its foreign policy agenda.

Japan strongly hopes that the new Governments of the Palestinian Authority and Israel will engage in direct discussion at the highest levels, under the concept of dialogue and cooperation, as early as possible in order to make renewed progress towards peace. In this regard, we take note of the remarks by acting Prime Minister Olmert, calling upon President Abbas to resume the negotiations for peace. We hope that President Abbas, for his part, will persevere in his own efforts in the peace process. We continue to extend our full support to him in that regard.

It is important for the international community to continue to send a positive and strong message to the new Government of the Palestinian Authority, led by Hamas, so that it will be encouraged to get on to the peace process, out of its own conviction and on its own initiative. At the same time, the international community should continue to encourage Israel to make greater efforts to realize peace through dialogue with the Palestinian side.

We also believe it is necessary for the international community to focus its attention on elaborating effective and appropriate measures to prevent any further deterioration in the living conditions of Palestinians.

On the occasion of the visit of President Abbas to Japan in May 2005, our Prime Minister announced his intention to provide approximately $100 million for the immediate future to meet the needs of the Palestinian population. Up to this point, more than 70 per cent of that pledge has already been implemented. Most recently, out of concern over the deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian people and to help meet the humanitarian needs of affected people, Japan decided on 17 March to extend additional food aid in the amount of approximately $6 million for Palestinian refugees, through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who are facing food shortages, through the World Food Programme. We hope that the humanitarian aid from us and from others will help to alleviate the hardships being experienced by the Palestinian people and will thereby contribute to advancing the peace process.

With regard to the issue of Palestinian assistance in general, Japan, as a long-standing donor, will carefully monitor the situation and formulate an appropriate response, taking into consideration the developments under the new Government of the Palestinian Authority and the position it takes on issues such as the advancement of the peace process, the renunciation of violence and terrorism and the policy towards its relationship with Israel.

In conclusion, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to continuing to play an active role in the efforts to promote peace in the Middle East.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): First of all, Mr. President, let me thank you for having convened this meeting. My delegation also wishes to thank Mr. Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on developments in the Middle East.

The grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to threaten international peace and security, and the Security Council cannot but address it with serious concern. The Council should be guided by its own decisions on the issue, which, over the years, have consistently affirmed the rights and interests of both Palestinians and Israelis. The Palestinians have a right to their own independent State. It must be a viable one that guarantees the freedom of movement of its citizens, one that has real prospects for sustainable development. Israelis equally have a right to their own State within well-defined and secure boundaries.

The means to achieve these ends is through a negotiated settlement between the two parties. Neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis must be allowed to impose unilateral solutions on the other party. Suicide bombings, indiscriminate shelling of civilians, wanton

destruction of property, barricades, targeted assassinations and all the other acts of violence that have been used by both sides have not moved them any closer to peace.

There has been no shortage of initiatives to bring about a peaceful negotiated settlement to the question of Palestine. The record is clear that neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis have faithfully adhered to their obligations and commitments.

As much as the election of Hamas may seem to be an aberration, the reality is that the resounding victory was achieved through free and fair elections, on which the Palestinian people deserve to be congratulated. It may be more productive for the international community to listen more carefully to the Palestinians and do more to address their rights and legitimate concerns, even as Hamas is pressed to abandon violence and extremism and enter into negotiations.

We are concerned about reports of basic food shortages increasingly making life unbearable for ordinary Palestinians. The irony is that some of those suffering may not even have voted for Hamas. Therefore, while we support the efforts of the international community to press Hamas to reconsider its position, care must be taken not to cause the economic and financial strangulation of the Palestinians. My delegation wishes to stress that the provision of funds for the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, emergency assistance and basic services, as well as for other purposes, must continue if economic, institutional and political collapse is to be avoided. In that regard, it is regrettable that Israel has withheld taxes and customs duties levied on goods destined for the occupied Palestinian territory. That action is tantamount to financially strangling the Palestinian National Authority and must be reversed through the timely disbursement of all such monies.

It is imperative that the incoming Hamas Administration earn the goodwill of all Governments and peoples eager for peace in the Middle East. We therefore urge Hamas to seriously rethink its position and to commit its Government to respect all existing agreements, including the ceasefire between the two parties. The newly elected Israeli authorities and the Hamas Government must be encouraged to re-examine their positions in order to advance the peace process.

This is the time for the international community, including the Quartet, to reflect seriously on the prevailing situation and to decide what needs to be done to achieve the long-sought two-State solution. In that endeavour, we must be united around the principles of international law and our shared objectives, as any polarization on the part of the Council would not help the cause of peace in the Middle East.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to thank Mr. Kalomoh for his briefing. My delegation agrees with its main conclusions.

I fully associate myself with the statement to be made shortly by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

This week, the Middle East experienced two major developments. In the Palestinian territories, the Government of Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh — composed exclusively of Ministers who are close to or members of Hamas — was given a vote of confidence by the parliament. In Israel, the elections to the Knesset saw the victory of the new Kadima party of Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, whom we congratulate on his success and who will be called upon to form the next coalition Government. It is undoubtedly too soon to speculate as to the consequences of those events for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Today, I shall limit myself to recalling the principles to which France attaches importance.

The Palestinian and Israeli peoples freely expressed themselves during the recent elections. We respect their choices. The Palestinian and Israeli leaders now bear a heavy responsibility: they must respond with concrete measures to the aspirations of the majority of their fellow citizens to peace and security.

In that regard, we welcome the respective positions taken by President Mahmoud Abbas and Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in favour of a resumption of negotiations. Indeed, France is convinced that unilateral approaches cannot replace a negotiated process, which alone can lead to a lasting peace. The international community — first and foremost, the Quartet and the countries of the region — must now support that willingness by helping the parties to get back on the path of dialogue and to think about conditions for a resumption of the peace process.

The new Palestinian Government will be judged on its actions. We deplore the fact that the Prime Minister, in his inaugural speech to the Legislative Council, did not formally endorse the fundamental principles of the peace process recalled by the Quartet: renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and recognition of the agreements concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Once again, we call on that Government to accept and implement those principles. We have noted the similar appeal made by President Abbas, whose resolute actions at the head of the Palestinian Authority we support.

Above and beyond the political developments and the hope for an early relaunching of the peace process, France remains concerned at the fragile situation on the ground. The security situation is still precarious, as illustrated by the grave consequences of the Israeli military operation against the Jericho prison on 14 March. We call on all the parties to show the greatest possible restraint. The Palestinian Authority must strengthen its fight against terrorism, in particular by halting the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip. The recent firing of a Katyusha-type rocket from Gaza towards Israeli territory is a very worrisome development in that regard. The Palestinian Authority must also enforce the law and re-establish public order in the territories under its control.

Israel, for its part, must put an end to its military activities that are contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention, particularly extrajudicial assassinations, which cause civilian casualties and fuel the cycle of violence. We call on the parties to implement without delay the arrangements concluded last year at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit.

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, recently emphasized once again by United Nations agencies, is a source of concern for us. France calls for full compliance with and swift implementation of all provisions of the Agreement on Movement and Access, concluded last November. We have also expressed our concern that the Palestinian people should not be punished and that the institutional gains of the past decade must not be sacrificed. In addition to increased support for the activities of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations on the ground, France is in favour of maintaining international aid through reliable and transparent channels, including those placed under the supervision of the President of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, we remain very concerned about the continued Israeli settlement in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and about the route of the separation wall, which contravenes the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolution ES/10-15. Once again, we call upon Israel to put an end to the unilateral and illegal measures that threaten the viability of the future Palestinian State and to comply with its obligations under international law. The initiatives that Israel could take in the West Bank must be the subject of an agreement with the PLO.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate my country's deep attachment to the creation of a viable, sovereign and democratic Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. I also wish to reaffirm the importance that France accords to the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): I would like to join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh for his briefing.

I align myself with the statement to be made shortly on behalf of the European Union by the Austrian presidency.

It is the Security Council's responsibility to maintain the momentum of the Middle East peace process. Indeed, at this time of new Governments — and we discuss the Middle East at a critical time — we must remind ourselves and all those involved of the obligations that have been taken on, including under the road map, with a view to achieving the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Congratulations are due to Ehud Olmert and the Kadima party on their election victory in Israel. The British Government looks forward to working with Mr. Olmert as he takes over the peace process and moves it forward.

Yesterday, the newly appointed cabinet of the Palestinian Authority was sworn in by President Abbas. The United Kingdom's policy on Hamas

remains unchanged. The new cabinet needs to recognize that with a democratic mandate come responsibilities, responsibility to govern in the best interests of the Palestinian people. Democracy is much more than winning an election. It is our firm view that democracy includes renouncing violence, and in this case recognizing the State of Israel and accepting the previous agreements reached by the Palestinian Authority. All those conditions have been set out by the Quartet in its statement of 30 January 2006, which we fully applaud, a statement which was reiterated this morning. It is unacceptable in our view to pursue political goals through violent means.

As Foreign Secretary Straw has made clear, the Palestinian people should not be punished for the decisions that the new Government might take. We are concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation, in particular by the troubling news that recently food has had to be rationed in Gaza. The United Kingdom is doing what it can to ensure that we can continue to provide humanitarian and development support to the Palestinian people to help them build a better future. We have been one of the largest bilateral donors to the Palestinian people, and we hope that we and the international community can continue to deliver such aid.

But we need to be absolutely clear that that funding does not support terrorism. The United Kingdom is deeply concerned by restrictions on freedom of movement in the West Bank and by the closure of crossing points between Gaza and Israel. We call on Israel to keep the crossings open, to maintain the re-opening that we have heard this morning, and we call on the Palestinian Authority to implement the Agreement on Movement and Access.

In our view, Israel should freeze all settlement expansion and dismantle outposts. The barrier's route should be on or behind the Green Line, not on occupied territory. But again, for its part, the Palestinian Authority needs to take effective measures to prevent terrorism, including the launching of some Kasam rockets which we have heard of, and to reform the security services, which is so much needed.

Above all, the United Kingdom remains committed to the principles of a negotiated two-State solution.

Turning to Lebanon, the United Kingdom welcomes the launch of a national dialogue and the consensus reached on certain key issues as a result of this process. This is an important step, not just towards the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), but also in the process of building a unified, stable and prosperous Lebanon.

We are concerned by recent reports of arms transfers across the Syria-Lebanon border. We look forward to the report next month by Special Envoy Roed-Larsen.

We welcome the Council's adoption yesterday of resolution 1664 (2006), mandating the Secretary-General to negotiate an agreement with the Lebanese on a tribunal of an international character to try those eventually indicted for the killing of Rafik Hariri. We believe that the process of reaching agreement on the shape and structure of that tribunal will support the work of the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission.

The successful completion of the Commission's investigation remains an essential element of efforts to promote security and stability in Lebanon and in the wider region. We reiterate the commitments and the requirements set out in Security Council resolutions 1595 (2005), 1636 (2005), 1644 (2005), and now 1664 (2006), for all Member States to cooperate fully and unconditionally with the Commission.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as representative of Argentina.

First, along with all previous speakers, I wish to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Kalomoh, for his comprehensive briefing.

Secondly, I wish to underscore that in recent days a number of significant events have taken place in the Middle East, including, in particular, the Israeli elections, the formation of a new Palestinian Government, the beginning of the Lebanese national dialogue and the holding of the Arab League summit in Khartoum.

We believe therefore that this is a transcendent moment for the region, in particular as regards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is now for the parties to take decisions that may to a large extent determine their future. The international community, which also has an important role to play, should help the parties to take decisions that facilitate the path towards a peaceful solution based on the coexistence of two

sovereign States living side by side in peace and security.

As regards the first of the events that I have noted — the Israeli elections — we wish to welcome the statements made by the leaders of some of the political parties that gained significant representation in the Knesset, reaffirming their commitment to the search for a negotiated settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are convinced that the solution to the conflict can be achieved only through good-faith negotiations, not through unilateral measures or military operations.

The President of the Palestinian Authority has also affirmed that he is committed to achieving a negotiated solution. We reaffirm the message that this Council sent on 3 February 2006 to the effect that all the members of the new Palestinian Government must unequivocally commit themselves to combat violence, to recognize the right of Israel to exist and to accept the agreements previously concluded between the two parties. We hope that the leaders of Hamas will respond to this appeal.

In this time of political readjustments and new alignments, we should not lose sight of the fact that both parties continue to have clear-cut obligations under the road map. In accordance with provisions of that document, Israel must cease any settlement-expansion activity and proceed to dismantle the outposts. Similarly, it must put an end to the building of the separation wall inside the Green Line. As far as these issues are concerned, we reaffirm that under international law, both the settlements and long sections of the wall are illegal.

We would also ask the Government of Israel to end extrajudicial executions, which, as we know, are in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Also, it should refrain from military operations such as that carried out in Jericho on 14 March, concerning which we feel bound to express our concern.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority should take all possible steps to restore order in the Palestinian territories and prevent attacks from those territories on Israeli territory. In keeping with the road map, all terrorist infrastructures must be dismantled and decisive measures must be taken against persons or groups that carry out or plan violent attacks on Israelis.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is a matter of particular concern to my country. The near-permanent closure of the Karni crossing point in recent months has caused considerable economic harm, and we all know that it has had a negative effect on the humanitarian situation in the territory. We therefore believe that urgent measures need to be taken to deal with the shortage of foodstuffs and basic goods in Gaza. We believe that the best solution would be the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, signed in November. We therefore call on the Israeli Government, the Quartet and the Palestinian Authority to accord priority to that issue with a view to reopening the crossing point and lifting the many obstacles in the way of the circulation of goods and persons in Gaza and the West Bank.

The recent World Bank report on the prospects for the Palestinian economy points unambiguously to the grave consequences of certain measures that have already been taken or that are being contemplated as a reaction to the outcome of the Palestinian legislative elections. We believe that the utmost caution must be exercised before such measures are taken, as a massive reduction of funds transfers and donations to the Palestine Authority would have a significant impact on Palestinian gross domestic product, raising the rate of unemployment and poverty to alarming levels. We reiterate that we cannot and should not punish the Palestinian people for the way in which they voted in the elections of 25 January.

At the same, the budgetary situation of the Palestinian Authority is a cause for concern, particularly in view of the Israeli decision not to transfer tax and customs duty revenues belonging to the Palestinians themselves. We should not forget that the Palestinian Authority plays an important role in providing basic social and economic services and that it pays the wages of a significant proportion of the economically active population in the occupied territories.

With regard to the recent developments in Lebanon, we welcome the beginning of a national dialogue. For the first time, all Lebanese factions are seated around the negotiating table with a view to arriving at an agreement on issues of great complexity and sensitivity. We fully support that process and call on the parties to do their utmost to reach agreement on outstanding issues, including on those provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) that have not yet been

implemented, especially those relating to the disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a great pleasure for me to congratulate you, Sir, on behalf of the Arab Group, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month; I wish you every success in your work. I would also like to thank your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the United States of America, for his wise management of the activities of the Council last month.

I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kalomoh for his briefing.

The regular monthly Secretariat briefings to the Security Council on developments in the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and the Shab'a farms, reveal the enormity of the legal and humanitarian violations that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to commit in those territories. Although we were optimistic about the peace negotiations, which we have always supported, and the approach of the road map, which is consistent with the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut summit, we have been repeatedly shocked by Israel's violations of its legal and political obligations under the relevant international conventions and agreements.

Israel's military withdrawal from some Palestinian territories in the Gaza Strip last September, which was implemented unilaterally and without coordination with the Palestinian side, was accompanied by a series of dangerous unilateral measures. These include the expansion of illegitimate settlements in the West Bank, in and around East Jerusalem and in the Syrian Golan; repeated closures and sieges of those territories, including the closure of checkpoints; the annexation of additional Palestinian land and natural resources; and extrajudicial killings and executions. Those actions have damaged most of the economic and social institutions in the West Bank and the Golan, preventing international humanitarian assistance workers from gaining access to the affected areas and freezing all customs and tax revenues belonging to the Palestinian Authority as a punishment of the Palestinian people for their democratic choice of the new Government. Those are some of the measures taken by Israel against the Palestinian people — measures that have created a state of paralysis in most of the Palestinian community's facilities and increased levels of unemployment, poverty and disease among the Palestinian people.

The Arab Group strongly condemns the unilateral Israeli measures, which were not approved by the Palestinian side and with regard to which there is no regional or international consensus. Such illegal measures are being taken in advance of negotiations on a final settlement, and will not contribute to the peace process or to future peaceful coexistence in the region. We therefore call for such unilateral measures by Israel to not be recognized by Member States or international organizations.

We also demand that the Security Council and major members of the Quartet shoulder their responsibilities and take effective measures consistent with the resolutions adopted by Arab leaders at their most recent summit, held in Khartoum.

First, they should condemn all unilateral measures taken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and demand that Israel immediately cease such measures, including the expansion of settlements, the building of the separation wall, the Judaization of Jerusalem, the attempt to annex Al-Aghwar — the Jordan Valley — and the division of the Palestinian territories into three isolated cantons in order to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. We also call on them to condemn Israel's attempt to make a unilateral declaration of its final borders at the expense of Palestinian sovereignty, which we consider to be a blatant violation to the principles of the road map, international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy, including the relevant resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and the July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Secondly, they should demand that Israel end its policy of starving the Palestinian people, release all funds belonging to the Palestinian National Authority, pursuant to its legal obligations under the Paris economic Protocol of 1994, and allow international humanitarian and relief assistance personnel to gain

access to the affected Palestinian territories in a timely manner.

Thirdly, they should provide the Palestinian people with the necessary protection from repeated Israeli attacks. Israel, the occupying Power, must also refrain from infringing upon the Palestinian authorities, invading their property and attacking unarmed civilians. All prisoners of the Areeha prison in Jericho who had been detained by the Palestinian authorities must be returned, pursuant to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which is applicable to the entirety of the occupied territories.

Fourthly, we call upon the international community to continue to provide financial grants and economic assistance to the Palestinian people, regardless of their democratic choice.

Fifthly, we reiterate the just demands of Syria regarding the restoration of the occupied Golan, and reject Israeli measures aimed at changing its legal status.

Sixthly, we demand that Israel stop its repeated air, land and sea violations of Lebanese sovereignty, resume its withdrawal from Shab'a farms and Kafr Shuba hills and hand over all landmine maps pertaining to southern Lebanon, in compliance with Israel's obligations as outlined in relevant international resolutions and in order to restore peace and stability in Lebanon.

In closing, we would emphasize that any further delay or procrastination by the Security Council in taking the necessary effective action to address these illegal measures will only send the wrong message to the Israeli Government and will encourage it to commit further violations. Accordingly, more than ever, we urge the Security Council, as the United Nations organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to shoulder its responsibilities in this regard and to apply no double standards, in order to avoid dragging the region into further violence and bloody conflict. This would ensure a suitable political environment that would enable the new Palestinian and Israeli Governments to resume their peace negotiations along to their natural track, and would provide an opportunity to establish a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principles of the road map, the Arab peace initiative and the vision of the establishment of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and within a framework of mutual respect.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and the countries aligning themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomes the holding of elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council that took place on 25 January and congratulates President Abbas and the Palestinian people on an electoral process that was free and fair. The European Union, in line with the External Relations Council's conclusions of 30 January, fully endorses the statements made by the Quartet on 26 and 30 January, as well as today. We reiterate our full support for President Abbas's determination to pursue a peaceful solution to the conflict with Israel. The European Union stresses that violence and terror are incompatible with democratic processes and urges Hamas and all other factions to renounce violence, to recognize Israel's right to exist and to disarm.

The European Union expects the newly elected Palestinian Legislative Council and the newly formed Government to commit themselves to a peaceful and negotiated solution of the conflict with Israel, based on existing agreements and the road map, as well as on the rule of law, reform and sound fiscal management. The Union urges the newly formed Government to confront all those engaged in terror and to dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. On this basis, the European Union stands ready to continue to support Palestinian economic development and democratic State-building. Against the background of the Quartet's appeal for measures to facilitate the work of the interim Palestinian Government, the European Union mobilized a €120-million package on 27 February to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian population and to help stabilize the finances of the caretaker Government. As the Quartet reiterated today, future assistance to the new Government will be reviewed by donors against its commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map.

The European Union congratulates acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on his success in the parliamentary elections on 28 March. We welcome the

reiteration of his commitment to the road map and call on the future Government to adhere to Israel's obligations under the road map. The EU continues to urge Israel to reverse its settlement policy and to freeze all settlement activity, to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001 and to end land confiscation and the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land, all of which threaten to render the two-State solution physically impossible to implement.

The European Union condemns all acts of terror and violence. It expresses its grave concern over the recent violent events in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. It calls on both parties to exercise maximum restraint. The European Union continues to urge the Palestinian Authority to take effective measures against terrorism, notably the launching of Qassam rockets, and to reform its security services. It calls upon Israel to stop the practice of extrajudicial killings, which is contrary to international law. We remind both parties of their obligations under the road map and to existing agreements, including the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and the Agreement on Movement and Access.

The European Union reaffirms its strong support for a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leading to the emergence of an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

On final status issues, the European Union will not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties. We reaffirm the central role of the Quartet in promoting progress in the peace process.

Turning to Lebanon, the European Union welcomes the launching of the national dialogue and the initial agreements in respect of the relevant Security Council resolutions. We encourage the continuation of the dialogue and hope it will contribute to political stability in the country by addressing critical issues of national concern. We reiterate our support for Lebanon's unity, stability and independence and remind its neighbours of their obligation to respect Lebanon's sovereignty.

We condemn the past violent attacks on Lebanese citizens, journalists and political leaders and the ensuing loss of lives. We are deeply concerned about the continued intimidation and about attacks against the right to freedom of expression.

The Union reaffirms its full support for the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission concerning the assassination of Rafik Hariri, as mandated by Security Council resolutions 1595 (2005), 1636 (2005) and 1644 (2005), and welcomes the report by Serge Brammertz. We urge all parties to cooperate unconditionally with the Investigation Commission and hope that light will be shed on this and other assassinations.

We underline the importance of the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), including the disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. We encourage the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority throughout the country.

We reaffirm our full support for the Government of Lebanon and urge it to launch the economic and political reforms programme initiated during the Core Group meeting held in New York in September 2005. The Union received Prime Minister Siniora on the margins of the External Relations Council meeting on 20 March and stands ready to support credible and effective plans for political and economic reform.

Moreover, the European Union expresses its grave concern at the persistence of tension and violence along the Blue Line and urges all parties to exercise the utmost restraint, to refrain from any provocation that could further escalate the tension and to fully respect the entire withdrawal line.

In conclusion, the European Union reaffirms the importance of and the need to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen): I have the honour to address this body on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. We have immense confidence

that your experience and wisdom will lead the deliberations of the Council to a satisfactory conclusion. Let me also avail myself of this opportunity to express the OIC's thanks and gratitude to Ambassador Bolton and the delegation of the United States for the efficient and prudent manner in which the work of the Security Council was handled last month.

The Council is meeting today to discuss an issue that has been on its agenda for decades, namely, the issue of the Middle East, which regrettably has not found its way to a just, comprehensive and lasting solution. It is the view of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference that there can be no peace in the Middle East unless and until the Arab-Israeli conflict is resolved on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the road map and the relevant United Nations resolutions and through negotiations between the parties. We are confident that the Palestinian National Authority is a good partner in the quest for peace.

In that context, we believe that unilateral solutions will not promote the cause of peace in an area that has suffered enormously from the lack of it. For peace to prevail, however, Israel must withdraw from the territories it occupied in the 1967 war, including the Syrian Arab Golan Heights and the remaining occupied lands in southern Lebanon, and must allow the creation of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

With that in mind, the OIC believes that it is incumbent upon the international community to exert pressure on the State of Israel to end its policy of creating and expanding settlements and to respect and abide by the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and demolish the separation wall. Furthermore, we believe that the Security Council and the Quartet have to move expeditiously to find a comprehensive, just and durable solution to the Middle East conflict on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Arab summit held in Beirut in 2002 and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

The daily Israeli practices of weakening the Palestinian infrastructure and casting doubt on the democratic choice of the Palestinian people are not conducive to restoring peace and stability. Nor are the blockades of territories — which deprive Palestinians of goods necessary for daily life — anything but violations of Israel's obligations as the occupying Power according to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Moreover, we believe that to withhold aid following the results of a fair and free election is to send a wrong message to the Middle East region. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to call upon the international community to provide the necessary economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people. In that context, it is imperative that Israel respect its obligations under the relevant agreements and release to the Palestinian side what Israel owes it in tax and custom duties levied on goods destined for the Palestinian territories.

In conclusion, if peace is to reign in the Middle East, a just and comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict must be found. The Security Council — notwithstanding Israel's daily harsh practices in the occupied territories and its pronouncements that it will impose unilateral solutions — is duty-bound, given its responsibility for the preservation of international peace and security, to help to find a fair resolution of this long conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

At the outset, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2006. We have taken note with satisfaction of the important work done by the Council under your able and skilful stewardship. We thank the Council for allowing NAM to participate in the deliberations on this crucial agenda item. Let me take this opportunity also to express appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. John Bolton of the United States, for the manner in which he conducted the important work of the Council last month.

The Non-Aligned Movement has in the past clearly stated its positions concerning the question of Palestine, including in this Chamber; I do not wish to repeat them here. It will suffice for me to briefly underscore six fundamental points that we think are relevant to the Council's deliberations today.

First, the question of Palestine should be resolved through negotiations between Israel and Palestine and on the basis of international law, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative, the illegality of any territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force, the road map and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Fulfilment of the provisions contained in those instruments could lead towards the achievement of the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders. Israel should withdraw from all territories it has occupied since the 1967 war: the occupied Palestinian territory, the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied lands in southern Lebanon.

Secondly, it is incumbent upon both Israel and Palestine, with the assistance of the international community, particularly the Quartet, to create the necessary conditions that could lead to the resumption of negotiations. These entail, in particular, denouncing violent measures or acts of terrorism, which have led to the unnecessary loss of lives and casualties on both sides, and non-resort by Israel to unilateral actions or settlements that could further undermine peace and stability in the region. We condemn all acts of violence, terrorism and destruction. We commend all efforts by the Quartet and encourage its members to redouble their efforts in seeking a just, lasting and comprehensive solution.

Thirdly, Israel should comply with its legal obligations as mentioned in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion concerning the separation wall and its associated regime, as called for by the General Assembly through resolution ES-10/15. The complete cessation of the construction of the wall and all settlement activities is essential for the survival of the road map. In this regard also, we urge the Secretary-General to expedite establishing the register of damage caused to all natural or legal persons concerned in connection with the construction of the wall as called for also in that resolution.

Fourthly, Israel should disburse without further delay to the Palestinian National Authority the full amount of the monthly tax and customs revenue that rightfully belongs to the Palestinians, in accordance with an Israeli-Palestinian protocol signed in Paris in 1994. The much-needed revenue could greatly alleviate the dire humanitarian conditions and sufferings of the Palestinian people, who are in need, inter alia, of food and water, medicine and medical treatment and education for their children.

Fifthly, the Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its support for the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. To this end, the Movement reaffirms the need for the speedy establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East in accordance with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Pending its establishment, the Non-Aligned Movement urges Israel, the only country in the region that has not joined the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) nor has declared its intention to do so, to renounce possession of nuclear weapons, to accede to the NPT without delay, to place promptly all its nuclear facilities under the full-scope safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), according to Security Council resolution 487 (1981), and to conduct its nuclear activities in conformity with the non-proliferation regime. Stability could not be achieved in a region where massive imbalances in military capabilities are maintained, particularly through the possession of nuclear weapons, which allow one party to threaten its neighbour and the region.

Finally, the Non-Aligned Movement congratulates the Palestinian people for exercising their democratic right, the right to freely choose and determine, without fear or favour, their representatives in the Palestinian Legislative Council during the elections last January. We share the assessment of the international community, including the Quartet, that the elections were conducted in a free, fair and secure manner. We certainly hope that the newly elected representatives would faithfully serve and pursue the interests and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains supportive of the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination, for independence and Statehood, for human rights and the rule of law, for freedom and dignity. We are all too familiar with their plight and their sufferings. In this regard, we stress that the outcome of the free and fair elections in Palestine should not be used as a pretext for the international community to cease extending economic and financial assistance and other forms of aid to the Palestinian people. It would indeed be completely unfair in the event that the international community were to punish

them for exercising their right to choose and determine their leaders through the ballot box.

The Non-Aligned Movement recalls that the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion stated that "in the Court's view, this tragic situation can be brought to an end only through implementation in good faith of all relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973)." The Council is in a position to prevail upon Israel and Palestine to achieve their long-held desire for a just, lasting and comprehensive final settlement. The Council shoulders the primary responsibility for ensuring that they do so. The Council must act — and the time to act is now — for the sake of the Palestinians and the Israelis, for the sake of the people in the region, and in order to serve and meet the collective interest and desire of all our global family of nations. We hope that our collective interest and desire will materialize sooner than later.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure to the representative of Senegal, Mr. Paul Badji, who will speak as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): Since I had the opportunity a few days ago to address the Council, I wish first to extend to you, Mr. President, once again my appreciation for the exemplary and efficient way in which you are presiding over the work of the Council, and then to thank all Council members for having given me the opportunity to take part, in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in this important discussion of the situation in Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The Council is meeting to consider important developments that have taken place in the region. Recently, while the attention of the international community was focused on the results of the Palestinian and Israeli elections, the Israeli Government energetically continued its activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, that undermine the prospects of one day establishing a viable, contiguous and independent Palestinian State. The Committee is much concerned by recent statements of members of the Israeli Government concerning the so-called Convergence Plan, which would mean that Israel would unilaterally define its permanent borders. This plan, among other things, provides that the major settlement blocs in the West Bank and in the Jordan Valley would be integrated into Israel, in addition to Israel's retaining control over some settlements in the West Bank. The Committee takes the view that the peace and security to which both Israelis and Palestinians aspire cannot be achieved by unilateral measures or measures that are not compatible with the peace process in the Middle East.

Settlement activities are still a cause for great concern. Approximately 12,000 Israelis have established themselves in the West Bank settlements in 2005, while apparently 9,000 have been evacuated from the Gaza Strip and the north of the West Bank, under the disengagement plan. The total number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank, without counting East Jerusalem, was close to 250,000 in 2005. The number of houses built has grown, as have solicitations of bids for new housing, in violation of the road map, which requires a freezing of all settlement activities, including natural expansion.

The most worrisome of Israel's settlement plans is the one called Plan E1, which seeks to link East Jerusalem with the largest West Bank settlement, Maale Adumim, by building approximately 3,500 dwellings in the zone between them. If that project is completed, the city will be effectively cut off from the rest of the West Bank, at the risk of crushing the Palestinians' aspirations to establish the capital of their future State in East Jerusalem.

Moreover, the Committee has closely followed the Israeli strategy in the Jordan Valley. According to a report issued in October 2005 by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Valley is becoming increasingly inaccessible to Palestinians living in the larger West Bank, unless they hold an identity card indicating an address in the north of the Valley. The most affected are those who have lived in the area for many years but whose identity card may not have the required address. Those who own property in the area but live elsewhere can no longer go there without authorization.

At the same time, the building of the separation wall continues, in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Last month the Israeli Defense Forces announced the commencement

of the building of the wall's southern section in the West Bank. The Committee has constantly reiterated that building the wall complicates the lives of Palestinians in the areas in question and is very harmful to them. Unfortunately, the register of damage requested by the General Assembly in resolution ES/10-15 has still not been established.

To further complicate matters, the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which is already catastrophic, is deteriorating even further. The constant closures hinder the transport of basic foodstuffs, medical supplies and humanitarian relief to the areas that need them most. The economy, the security services and the public institutions, which are fragile, need sustained support. The Committee calls on the international donor community to increase its assistance to the Palestinian people in these particularly trying times.

The Committee wishes to reiterate its long-held position that the United Nations, including the Security Council, must continue to shoulder its permanent responsibility with regard to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is settled satisfactorily, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and with respect for international legitimacy, and until the Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable rights. The Committee has also stressed the key role of the Security Council in the re-establishment of peace.

The Committee, for its part, will continue to lend its political support to the Palestinian people until there is full realization of their inalienable right to self-determination without external interference, their right to independence and national sovereignty and their right to return to their homes and the properties from which they were displaced and uprooted.

That is why we will support any international action aimed at creating an independent Palestinian State by peaceful means. The Committee will work, first and foremost, with the President of the Palestinian Authority. It will also work with the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people who respect the principles of non-violence and the Israeli-Palestinian agreements concluded previously.

A settlement negotiated between the parties will give birth to an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and the other neighbouring countries. Such a settlement — based on the principles set out at the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the agreements concluded previously by the parties, the Arab Peace Initiative and the acceptance of Israel as a neighbour, living in peace and security within the framework of a comprehensive settlement — will put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the occupation that has lasted since 1967.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.